

Core Concepts

Division of Juvenile Corrections

Moving Forward Together

Issue 7, December 2014

Resilience



"Until we better understand children's strategies for resilience we will mistake our children's efforts for survival to be signs of dangerous, delinquent, deviant or disordered behaviour. Children have shown me that problematic behaviours are still a search for health. These youth tell me that despite appearances to the contrary, they are all waking up each morning committed to surviving." -Dr. Michael Ungar, August 2005

Many youth who have come through our doors have experienced negative things in their lives we can only imagine. Yet there are many other youth with similar experiences whom we will never meet.

Why are some youth able to overcome adversities and become responsible, productive members of their communities, never entering the juvenile justice system, while others are not?

Although we cannot prevent the negative experiences youth have already endured, we can help them learn to be more resilient and equip them to tools cope with future challenges. This Core Concepts issue introduces the concept of resilience and identifies opportunities for helping youth build developmental assets that support resilience.

Characteristics of Resilient Youth

All individuals have characteristics that influence their responses to stressful situations. Risk factors are the things that increase the probability of a negative outcome. These can be both individual traits, (i.e., poor behavior control or antisocial beliefs or attitudes) or environmental factors (i.e., high-crime neighborhood or living in poverty). Protective factors are individual or environmental characteristics, conditions, or behaviors that reduce the effects of stressful life events. These factors also increase an individual's ability to avoid future risks and promote social and emotional competence to thrive in all aspects of life.

As a result of her research on resilience, Bonnie Benard identifies both individual and environmental characteristics that foster youth resilience. These characteristics can be used as a foundation in programs to promote positive youth development and community involvement.

Individual Characteristics

Social Competence - strong relationship skills, flexibility, cross-cultural competence, empathy and caring for others, strong communication skills and a good sense of humor

Autonomy - sense of identity, internal locus of control, self-awareness, resistance skills

Problem-Solving Skills - the ability to plan, insight, critical thinking, and resourcefulness

A sense of purpose and belief in a bright future - goal-directedness, motivation, educational aspirations

Environmental Characteristics

Caring Relationships - supportive caring relationship with an adult, whether in or outside the family

Opportunities for Participation - meaningful involvement and responsibility, power to make decisions, opportunities for reflection and dialogue

High Expectations - belief in the youth's ability to achieve, being respectful, recognizing and building on youth's strengths



Fostering Youth Resilience

The Search Institute identified 40 essential building blocks of healthy development broken down into external and internal assets to help youth grow up to be healthy, caring and responsible individuals. There are many opportunities in our daily interactions with youth for us to help to promote these assets. The Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets are listed below, along with some ideas for how you can help youth develop those assets.

External

Support

1. Family support
2. Positive family communication
3. Other adult relationships
4. Caring neighborhood
5. Caring school climate
6. Parent involvement in schooling

Empowerment

7. Community values youth
8. Youth as resources
9. Service to others
10. Safety

Boundaries & Expectations

11. Family boundaries
12. School Boundaries
13. Neighborhood boundaries
14. Adult role models
15. Positive peer influence
16. High expectations

Constructive Use of Time

17. Creative activities
18. Youth programs
19. Religious community.
20. Time at home

Be a consistent, dependable source of positive support for youth

Ask a youth what his or her favorite book is; provide positive reinforcement when you see a youth reading

Give youth appropriate opportunities to be involved in decision-making or to mentor peers

Avoid glorifying or laughing at the risky behavior of others, such as people on TV; reinforce the value of personal restraint in risky situations

Model hard work, a positive attitude, and healthy relationships for youth in your day to day activities

Affirm youth when they make non-violent, safe choices; tell them what they did right

Encourage career exploration and goal-setting; ask youth about their goals and dreams

Internal

Commitment to Learning

21. Achievement Motivation
22. School Engagement
23. Homework
24. Bonding to school
25. Reading for Pleasure

Positive Values

26. Caring
27. Equality and social justice
28. Integrity
29. Honesty
30. Responsibility
31. Restraint

Social Competencies

32. Planning and decision making
33. Interpersonal Competence
34. Cultural Competence
35. Resistance skills

Positive Identity

36. Peaceful conflict resolution
37. Personal power
38. Self-esteem
39. Sense of purpose
40. Positive view of personal future

In what other ways can you promote the development of these 40 assets in the youth in your care?

Sources

Benard, B. (1996). Resilience research: A foundation for youth development. *New Designs for Youth Development*, 12 (3), 4-10. Search Institute: Search Institute®, Developmental Assets® and Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth®. 1997, 2006 by Search Institute, Minneapolis, MN; www.search-institute.org.

Ungar, M. (2005). Introduction: Resilience across cultures and contexts. In M. Ungar (ed.), *A handbook for working with children and youth: Pathways to resilience across cultures and contexts* (pp.xv-xxxix). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ungar, M. (2005). Delinquent or simply resilient? How "problem" behaviour can be a child's hidden path to resilience. www.voicesforchildren.ca

<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/Building-Resilience-in-Children.aspx>

Additional resources:

<http://www.fosteringresilience.com/about.php>

<http://www.resiliency.com/free-articles-resources/the-foundations-of-the-resiliency-framework/>

For more information...

Katie Herrem, Juvenile Program Services Supervisor

Program Services Unit
Division of Juvenile Corrections
608-240-5934
katie.herrem@wi.gov